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ABSTRACT

This paper, presented by the Black Advisory Task Force to the Child Development Associate (CDA) Consortium, reports on the development of the "collaborative process" approach to the examination and credentialing of CDA candidates. The collaborative approach was designed to be free from racial bias, to be predictive of job performance, and to be a relevant and workable assessment process. The fundamental assumptions underlying collaborative assessment are outlined, and three essential features of the collaborative assessment process are described: (1) evaluation of the candidate's performance with children in the child care center where she or he works, (2) responsibility and control by the CDA candidate over some parts of the process, and (3) development of a community assessment team incorporating perspectives of parents, center professionals and external professionals to provide continuing feedback to the candidate and finally to judge the candidate's competence. It is concluded that collaborative training and collaborative assessment on this model should proceed together, and that this training assessment method can be proposed as a viable alternative to traditional methods. (GO)

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COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT: A POSITION

BY

THE BLACK ADVISORY TASK FORCE
TO
THE CDA CONSORTIUM

Sponsored by

THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATE CONSORTIUM

Publication No. 2.0874-1

The Child Development Associate Consortium

August 19, 1974

The Child Development Associate Consortium devotes its energies to the development of a system which will enable trained observers to assess the skills of personnel who work with young children in group settings.

In its efforts, the Consortium has recognized that American children live in various social settings, possess different cultural heritages, and know many economic backgrounds. Their preschool experiences take place in surroundings that differ vastly.

These differences, so inherent in our national life, demand a flexible assessment system - one adaptable to different clientele and conditions. In its search for flexibility, the Consortium sponsors a number of colloquies with professional groups which are representative of specific ethnic minorities. The Consortium seeks their insights, experiences and information to help formulate the desired flexibility in assessment.

The following position paper has emerged from the work of the Black Advisory Task Force which resulted from the Black Colloquy of February 8-10, 1973. All of the colloquies and the task force have been sponsored and participants invited by the Consortium. Though they have been carefully selected, the Consortium does not pretend that participants are representative of all viewpoints within their various ethnic groups. The Consortium does not endorse presentations found in the following position paper nor do we claim that it speaks for the entire Black community. This paper is submitted by the task force members to express their concerns and opinions on the special needs of CDA candidates working with young children.

In addition to its usefulness to the Consortium, this paper holds intrinsic interest because it offers insights into the special needs of a group of American children about whom little is known. These children have frequently been educated - or miseducated - under standards and methods appropriate to white, middle-class children. A paper such as this one should have interest for early childhood specialists. We publish it now for its immediate value rather than wait until the conclusion of the CDA project.

Too many non-Black "experts" have presumed to speak for the Black community. For these and other reasons the Consortium is pleased to present "Collaborative Assessment: A Position," by the Black Advisory Task Force. It has been lightly edited for production purposes; there has been no change of content, thoughts or opinions.

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Executive Director

/rlh

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COLLABORATIVE ASSESSMENT: A POSITION

BY

The Black Advisory Task Force to the CDA Consortium

The Black Advisory Task Force, set up as a special advisory group to the CDA Consortium, was given an assignment to review the work of the CDA contractors who were developing means for assessing the competence of CDA's. At that time, contractors were at work specifying competencies and developing measures of performance under the six general competency area headings which had been given to the CDA Consortium by the Office of Child Development under the terms of the initial grant.

The Black Task Force feared that attempts to measure performance could lead to the creation of an "item pool," having neither theoretical nor programmatic integrity. Task force members reasoned that a thousand or more items would be an unwieldy number to use in assessing any one candidate. So it was necessary to select a sample of items to form a test. In preliminary reviews of the item pool produced by the Consortium in FY73, the Black Task Force suggested that use of the item pool or any sample of items taken from it to make a "test" would result in arbitrary measures, atomistic views of candidates, and lack of predictive validity. Furthermore, it seemed certain that an assessment procedure derived in this way very likely would be below such standards as those stated in the American Psychological Association's technical recommendations for assessment instruments.

Members of the Black Task Force were all familiar with the history of the assessment of performance in many vocational areas, such as the civil service, firemen's examinations and performance examinations in teaching. Nearly always these examinations have had a very low level of correlation with job performance, and have tended to yield distributions of scores which have screened out minority applicants. The Black Task Force was concerned that any examination be highly predictive of job performance and that racial bias be eliminated. Task Force members wanted children to be assured of getting competent, dedicated helpers who would be committed to each child's growth and to the growth of the community.

Our grave reservations regarding what might emerge as an assessment instrument led us to consider the possibility of developing an alternative assessment procedure which would enable a candidate to demonstrate competence in actual center settings with children, parents and professionals. As a direct outgrowth of intensive work sessions, the Black Task Force conceived of a process known as "collaborative assessment," a unique approach to assessment of CDA candidates in an actual center setting. In spring, 1973, CDAC funded a small pilot project to develop our model of the collaborative assessment process. In 1974, this process was refined and a field test designed with further funding from the Consortium.

Based upon many work sessions and the two projects on collaborative assessment, the Black Task Force has refined the concept and now presents its position.

Assessment General Consideration

It is because of our strong belief in the highest of standards among professionals who work with our children that we believe it necessary to insure quality by building a relevant, workable assessment process. We believe that traditional assessment procedures and standardized tests focusing upon narrow ranges of objectives create the illusion that high scores equal high standards for teachers, and therefore, the educational process. In practice, we have seen that teachers and helpers who have met these "high standards" have often been unable to help Black children to grow. These standards tend most often to be focused upon limited cognitive objectives to the exclusion of supporting a child's full growth and development. On the other hand, many non-credentialed teachers who are able to help children grow are excluded by "high standards" or invalid measures of performance. The casualties among our children in the early years as well as in the later formal school years are testimonial to this failure. Researchers have sought answers for this lack of growth among Black children in the conditions of the family, in the heredity of the children, or in the "culture of poverty." We believe that this victim analysis is suitable for detached academics who like observation for its own sake, but does not provide the answers which we seek. We believe that the adults who work with children can make a significant difference. We believe that adults who work with children can gain skill through training. We believe that the level of skill and other significant teacher behaviors can be assessed in relationship to the growth of children. Toward that end we have come to certain fundamental assumptions which lead to principles of collaborative assessment.

Assumptions

1. It takes a variety of perspectives to obtain a real sense of what transpires in an educational setting. No one assessor or test can achieve full and accurate descriptions.

2. The dynamics of an assessment group are vital and must be the subject of special attention and planning. Successful group functioning is not automatic.

3. Assessment and training are continuing inseparable processes.

4. Assessment is most effective where there are many parties to the process, not simply an "outside evaluator."

5. Special considerations and structuring are necessary to guarantee a high quality of contribution from all who participate in assessment. Hierarchical arrangements generally allow one perspective to dominate the process, ending in a poor assessment.

6. The assessment process can be disruptive to the regular teaching process, disturbing pupil progress and natural interaction. This, however, can be minimized.

7. Properly conducted situational (on-site) assessment will yield CDA's with flexible skills as helpers who can work in a variety of settings. On-site assessment probably accomplished this better than other methods.

8. An assessment environment can be created so that there is a minimum of threat to CDA candidates.

Effects on Conditions Affecting the Candidate

1. Assessment is a threatening experience for any trainee and will, to the extent that it remains threatening, cause the candidate to become defensive and less able to reveal his or her potential, or the absence of potential.

2. Any assessment is always limited to a sampling of a teacher's activities. From this sampling, inferences are made about his or her total impact.

3. To a large extent, the sampling will involve an arbitrary selection of information, since there is no "right" set of information for good measurement. Some broad, hard information is required but no particular kind of information is required.

4. Many of the unmeasurable (at present) aspects of teaching are the most vital part of the process.

5. The acquisition by a candidate of cognitive information alone is less important than his ability to display adequacy in the use of information (self-selected experience).

6. While teachers may exhibit some relevant skills or behaviors on cue, other behaviors cannot be evoked at will; they occur only in real contexts at unscheduled times.

Assumptions - Local Control Issues (Community)

1. The state of the art of measurement in teacher education is so undeveloped that inquiry of this kind is often largely atomistic and unrelated to essential teacher-pupil functioning.

2. Assessment is primarily for local needs. It proceeds best when local people feel the need and responsibility for finding out what is going on in certain programs. In constrast, few local operatives value or use the results of assessment done at a remote national level. Since these results often are not treated seriously, such remote assessment makes very little difference on the local level where children are concerned.

3. No one perspective is more valuable than another. All are necessary - the perspectives of parents, professionals, the community and so forth.

4. There are no standard goals for early childhood education; therefore, there can be no standardized assessment for teachers. Assessment must be specific to the site. The ultimate criterion for successful teacher performance is the positive growth and development of children.

Collaborative Assessment

Collaboration by those knowledgeable about and having an investment in the center setting is the central ingredient of the assessment process, and is compatible with and flows from the assumptions above. The unique contributions of many participants are necessary to true collaboration. Collaboration in assessment is more than nice or desirable; it is necessary.

Collaboration, as a position or process, should be understood as distinct from any particular data for assessment. Even with its limitations, a paper and pencil test can be developed collaboratively. Even though a video-taped portfolio developed by a candidate may be rich in information, it could be treated in a non-collaborative fashion. When we speak of collaboration, we refer to a collective enterprise of shared planning, implementation, review and judgement.

Traditional Assessment. In our view traditional assessment tends to be a "one-shot" project - often a test given at the end of a training period. Just because a team of assessors works together does not make an assessment collaborative. We see traditional assessment attempts in the following ways. They are external to the candidate and the learning environment. They are standardized and inflexible. They are normative, not ideographic. Traditionally both questions and answers are predetermined. Traditional assessment deals with abstract ideas about teaching and learning behavior rather than with behavior itself in a specific context. It deals primarily with cognitive information. Traditional assessment yields little if any information about a candidate's values and feelings about himself or herself, children, or the community, or how those feelings and values may manifest themselves in a real setting. Consequently, important feed-back is not available to the candidate and others to guide professional development. In general, the results of traditional assessment are seldom put to use. These results tend to become data for charts, graphs, reports, or manuscripts which feed the gamerooms of academia. Our children require more!

Describing collaborative assessment. Our concept of collaborative assessment is an emerging one. It is incomplete. The best way of communicating about the concept is to describe what is happening, with whom, where, and for what reason. The following description is our justification for a collaborative approach to assessment, even as it is a description of elements in the process.

The CDA candidate in the collaborative assessment process. The CDA is an active part of the collaborative assessment process in several ways. The candidate controls several parts of the process in varying degrees. For instance, the candidate alone determines what data will become a part of his portfolio, the time for the selection of the data, and the pace of the assessment process. The candidate has some control over the personnel on the assessment team; that is, the candidate can select team members from a pool of CDAC-approved potential assessors. We believe that by having the candidate be responsible for these important matters a climate is developed within which collaborative assessment can take place. We believe that the candidate will under these conditions feel safer in being assessed, have greater equity as a participant in the process, feel the process to be more fair, and approach the process as a person of status. Such beneficial conditions will cause the assessment to

be more sensitive to the candidate's unique experiences, learning style, communication's style and general responsiveness. Such a benign climate will make the candidate more open to feedback and help, and more relaxed in demonstrating competencies. We expect (indeed in our pilot projects it proved to be true) that candidate competencies will surface which might well be overlooked if candidates are defensive and unwilling to be observed.

In collaborative assessment the candidate negotiates and probes with the assessment team both the specific meaning of given competency areas as well as the criteria for successfully demonstrating these competencies. We believe that this part of the process helps all participants to clarify expectations, and to develop a more precise "common language" for dialogue about the process. This group process is also the arena within which respect for participants can grow - there is an opportunity to share the perspective of those people competent to contribute. All of these experiences contribute to a climate in which the candidate can receive feedback and assessment team members can perceive the assessment accurately.

In an ongoing assessment process the candidate may raise timely questions and elaborate on his or her responses while they are fresh and relevant. Under such conditions we believe that the candidate will feel that his or her chances of being understood are greatly increased. This supportive, trusting, open environment will make it possible to discover whether the candidate really can perform.

The community assessment team in the collaborative assessment process. As mentioned earlier, every team is not a collaborative team. Our concept of a collaborative team is based upon our belief that it takes more than one person or instrument to see and understand candidates' behavior. The collaborative team is primarily responsible for developing the environment conducive to cooperative labor. We believe that the make-up of the team will be crucial to that end. The perspectives of parent, center professional and external professional are required if a full assessment is to occur. A simple majority of the team should determine whether a candidate is competent to work as a CDA. An equal vote for each member will contribute to the establishment of peer roles in the assessment process.

The community assessment team serves as final judge and continuing advocate for the candidate. Having a variety of perspectives represented provides a means of checking perceptions reducing arbitrariness in decisions or interpretations. A candidate's fate is not in any one person's hands. Further, the variety of perspectives almost guarantees that decisions will be made on the broadest base of information. For example, both a candidate's professional information and indication of his ability to function in a given community are likely to be of high importance to a team including both professional and community members.

The community assessment team must be organized to provide continuing feedback to the candidate to make the final assessment a much less threatening prospect.

Collaborative teams are much more accountable for their interpretations and judgements than are isolated assessors, external teams or standardized instruments, because of the deeper knowledge that the collaborative team has of the

particular teaching-learning context. Discussion about experiences requires good communication; arbitrary judgements or interpretations are not likely here. A collaborative community assessment team, as we conceive it, participates in the assessment process so that the process itself becomes flexible, adaptable and accommodating to each unique context. This makes for greater fairness and accuracy in assessment.

The site in the collaborative assessment process. Conducting assessment on-site is vital to developing the conditions under which a candidate can best demonstrate the kind of competence that makes a difference. Focusing upon a candidate's behavior with children minimizes the chance for arbitrary judgements and unfounded interpretations. With on-site assessment there is less room for argument at levels of abstraction which are unfruitful so far as pupil learning is concerned. By having the collaborative assessment team conduct its review in the context of the center, there is less chance that the candidate's competence will be misunderstood or misjudged simply because he or she speaks a non-standard language or represents a cultural style unfamiliar to external assessors. The candidate's success in helping children becomes the focus for assessment when it happens at a site. Further, at the site behavior being assessed is most likely to be related to actual tasks which candidates will be expected to perform.

Conclusion

Contrast the collaborative assessment process described above with our view of standard assessment processes. We believe that collaboration makes a significant, positive difference in the meaningful, complete, accurate certification of competent CDA's. It is also most important to note that when assessment follows the collaborative pattern described, it makes no real sense to separate training from assessment either in practice or in conceptualization. Perhaps the funds for this kind of assessment should not be separate at all, but should be included as part of training program funds and, properly carried out, assessment would be part of training. It follows naturally from our point of view that collaborative assessment calls for collaborative training, or more correctly, that collaborative training and collaborative assessment are really aspects of the same thing - collaborative training/assessment.

We value and count first and foremost upon the judgement of knowledgeable, perceptive and dedicated local assessors. We have seen no better alternative.

(NOTE: For a description of one way of managing a collaborative assessment process, the reader is referred to the embryonic CDA-sponsored pilot project by Collaborative Change, Inc. - Final Report, 1974. The parts after the first three sections are specifically recommended.)

For more details on the activities of the Black Advisory Task Force, write: Ms. Canary Girardeau, Director of Credentialing and Community Relations, The Child Development Associate Consortium, 7315 Wisconsin Avenue, Washington, D.C., 20014.